



Morning Alert - Tuesday, December 6, 2016

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HEADLINES

Morning news

All national papers and most TV networks gave prominent top coverage to Prime Minister Abe's announcement last night that he will visit Pearl Harbor with President Obama in late December to pay tribute to those killed there and hold his last summit with President Obama. Abe will be the first sitting premier to visit Pearl Harbor. Foreign Minister Kishida is expected to accompany Abe. The White House later issued a press release announcing the President's planned meeting with Abe and their joint visit to the USS Arizona Memorial on Dec. 27.

INTERNATIONAL

Abe, Obama to visit Pearl Harbor

All papers highlighted Abe's surprise announcement on his plan to visit Hawaii on Dec. 26-27, quoting him as saying: "It will be a visit to comfort the souls of the victims [of the Pearl Harbor attack]. We would like to show the world our resolve never to repeat the horrors of war.... I would also like to make this visit an opportunity to play up the value of U.S.-Japan relations."

At the war memorial, the premier is expected to offer flowers and deliver remarks, which probably will not include an expression of apology. According to the articles, Abe has been mulling a trip to Pearl Harbor since he gave a speech for the U.S. Congress in April last year in the hope of "putting an end to apology diplomacy." Abe and Obama reportedly agreed to make a joint visit to Pearl Harbor when they had a brief conversation on the margins of the APEC leaders' meeting in Peru last month. In response to Abe's proposal on paying joint homage at the Hawaii memorial, the President said: "It would be meaningful for U.S.-Japan relations. A visit should not be something that is forced

on you.” Asahi and Nikkei claimed that Abe put forward the idea on visiting Pearl Harbor to the President in order to mend his ties with the U.S. leader, which allegedly became strained when Abe met with President-elect Trump in mid-November. Because the White House was displeased by the Abe-Trump meeting, it reportedly turned down a Japanese proposal for a summit between the prime minister and president on the margins of the APEC meeting in Lima.

Final chapter in reconciliation

The papers underscored that the planned joint visit to the USS Arizona Memorial, together with President Obama’s visit to Hiroshima in May, will represent the pinnacle of bilateral reconciliation between the two nations. Asahi quoted Abe as telling his associates after yesterday’s announcement: “I would like to show that with my upcoming trip, the ‘postwar’ era will have completely ended so my successors can view ‘Pearl Harbor’ as a mere episode in history.” An unnamed high-ranking DOS official said: “Genuine reconciliation between the U.S. and Japan will become a reality.” Nikkei said Abe’s visit will probably be able to address the negative feelings toward Japan associated with the Pearl Harbor attack held by some American conservatives, including strong supporters of President-elect Trump.

Trump’s election behind Abe’s decision

All papers speculated that Donald Trump’s victory in the U.S. presidential election perhaps prompted Abe to make the historic decision to visit Hawaii, with Asahi quoting a source close to the premier as saying: “Because Trump’s pacifist orientation is not very strong, the premier’s trip to Pearl Harbor will not be possible once he is sworn in. It’s now or never.” According to Mainichi, the Japanese side is hopeful that Abe’s Pearl Harbor visit will help stabilize trans-Pacific relations by giving a positive impression to the American public and members of Congress based on the assessment that U.S.-Japan relations may become strained under the Trump administration. Sankei wrote that with his Pearl Harbor visit, Abe is hoping to send a message to the Trump administration that the Asia-Pacific region is critical for the U.S.’s peace and prosperity and that maintaining a solid relationship with Japan is indispensable for countering China and North Korea. Abe also hopes to impress upon China and South Korea that they should not be bound by history issues in conducting diplomacy toward Japan because history will no longer be an impediment to deepening U.S.-Japan relations.

U.S. welcomes Abe’s trip

All papers reported on the White House announcement on Abe’s Hawaii trip that reads in part: “The two leaders’ visit will showcase the power of reconciliation that has turned former adversaries into the closest of allies, united by common interests and shared values.” The papers conjectured that the departing U.S. leader is hoping that his Hiroshima visit in May and Abe’s trip to Hawaii will become a diplomatic legacy at a time when President-elect Trump has criticized his foreign policy

accomplishments, including the Iran nuclear agreement and the TPP. With the incoming U.S. leader's repeated calls for Tokyo to pay more for stationing U.S. troops in Japan in mind, President Obama is also set to warn the Trump administration against damaging U.S.-Japan relations, which he views as a cornerstone of U.S. policy toward the Asia-Pacific region.

Abe confident public will support visit

While noting that some nationalists at home may react strongly to Abe's planned trip to Hawaii, Yomiuri explained that the prime minister chose to go ahead with it in the belief that public support for him is strong enough to weather possible criticism from conservative elements. In the words of an unnamed senior MOFA official, "strategic diplomacy requires a stable political foundation."

Abe to visit four Asia-Pacific nations in January

Nikkei wrote that arrangements are being made for PM Abe to visit Australia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines in mid-January in order to demonstrate Tokyo's close bonds with its Asia-Pacific partners given that it remains uncertain whether the Trump administration will uphold President Obama's "rebalance-to-Asia" approach. The paper added that Abe may consider going to Washington to attend President Trump's inauguration ceremony.

POLITICS

Speculation rekindled on snap election in January

Nikkei wrote that Abe's announcement on his visit to Hawaii surprised ruling and opposition lawmakers, some of whom projected that the premier may be inclined to dissolve the Lower House next month for a snap election because he anticipates that the landmark trip will further boost his public support. The paper said speculation on a snap election early next year had died down given that no major breakthrough is likely on the Northern Territories dispute when Russian President Putin visits Japan next week. The prime minister now apparently believes that his Pearl Harbor visit will offset the public's negative reaction to the anticipated enactment of "unpopular" legislation on the legalization of casinos and pension reform.

Casino legislation to pass Lower House today

All dailies predicted that the casino bill is likely to clear the Lower House plenary session today with support from the LDP and the Japan Innovation Party, noting that the Komeito party leadership will allow its lawmakers to decide on their own on whether or not to approve it. The Democratic Party plans to boycott the vote. Several papers added that opposition to the bill is fairly strong among LDP Upper House parliamentarians, with a large number of them raising concerns about such issues as gambling addiction and money laundering during yesterday's meeting on the subject. They stressed that the legislation should be deliberated extremely carefully in the upper chamber.

SECURITY

Japan to allocate largest-ever amount for national defense

Nikkei reported that Japan's defense budget for FY2017 will be about 5.1 trillion yen, the largest amount ever and marking an increase for the fifth consecutive year. The Defense Ministry is anxious to procure the necessary defense equipment to counter China's maritime advancement and North Korea's nuclear and missile provocations. The additional funds are expected to be used for deploying upgraded missile defense platforms, developing new submarines and surface-to-ship missiles, and enhancing cyber defense mechanisms.

ECONOMY

Benefits of TPP would be greatly reduced without U.S. participation

Mainichi took up remarks made at the Diet on Monday by Minister for Economic and Fiscal Policy Ishihara, who projected that without U.S. membership, the economic benefits of the TPP on the Japanese economy would drop by half. The daily pointed out that the GOJ had estimated that the nation's GDP would be boosted by 14 trillion yen if the regional free trade deal took effect with full membership.

